

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. When strikethrough cannot easily be perceived, or when five or fewer characters are deleted, [[double brackets]] are used to show the deletion. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method utilized by a system including a plurality of user terminals and a computer connected to the user terminals via a network, the information-distribution method including:
 - accepting, from any of the user terminals, designation of at least one other user terminal among the user terminals, by the computer;
 - storing, by the computer, a buddy list in which at least one identifier identifying a user terminal is correlated with at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal designated in said accepting designation;
 - accepting, by the computer, from a source user terminal among the user terminals, a distribution content to be distributed and a distribution condition according to which the distribution content is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;
 - determining, by the computer, one or more primary destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the primary destination user terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition;
 - transmitting, by the computer, the distribution content to the one or more primary destination user terminals;

until the stop condition is satisfied, ~~for~~ by any recipient user terminal that has received the distribution content including any of the primary destination terminals, determining, ~~by the computer,~~ one or more destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the one or more destination user terminals being selected from user terminals ~~whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the a~~ buddy list of the recipient user terminal, in accordance with the distribution condition, and transmitting the distribution content from the recipient user terminal to the one or more destination terminal.

2. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein the distribution condition sent by the source user terminal to the computer includes an identifier of a primary user terminal.

3. (CANCELLED).

4. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further comprising:

recording stop-condition candidates that are alternatives for the stop distribution condition; and

selecting at least one of the stop-condition candidates as the stop distribution condition by the source user terminal.

5. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a maximum count of user-terminals that distribute the distribution content.

6. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a depth-level restriction indicating path length between the source user terminal and user terminals to which the distribution content is distributed.

7. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, further including:

receiving, from reporter-user terminals among the user terminals, status reports on user terminals; and

storing statuses of the user terminals as reported correlatively with user identifiers identifying the reporter-user terminals, wherein the stop-condition candidates include a restriction of user terminals distributing the distribution content according to the corresponding status.

8. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 4, wherein the stop-condition candidates include an expiration date for distributing the distribution content.

9. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein the distribution content contains a request of a user operating the source user terminal, and the stop distribution condition includes a fulfillment condition that serves as a judgment criterion for judging whether or not the request has been met.

10. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 9, further comprising:

storing fulfillment-condition candidates that are alternatives for the fulfillment conditions; and

accepting a selection of at least one of the fulfillment-condition candidates.

11. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, wherein

the distribution content contains a request by a user operating the source user terminal; the distribution condition includes a fulfillment condition that serves as a judgment criterion for judging whether or not the request has been met, and

if the fulfillment condition has been met, user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the source user terminal receive a response to the request.

12. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, further comprising:

storing response candidates that are alternatives for the response; and
selecting at least one of the response candidates.

13. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, wherein further comprising:

storing response candidates that are alternatives for the response, and
selecting at least one of the response candidates, wherein the response candidates include a response reporting, to user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the source user terminal, that the fulfillment condition has been satisfied.

14. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, further comprising:

storing response candidates that are alternatives for the response, and
selecting at least one of the response candidates, wherein the response candidates include a response reporting to the source user terminal user identifiers identifying user terminals that have contributed to satisfying the fulfillment condition.

15. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, further including:

storing response candidates that are alternatives for the response, and
selecting at least one of the response candidates, wherein the response candidates include a response reporting, to user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the source user terminal, that the fulfillment condition for which has been satisfied.

16. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 11, further including:

receiving a response from a user terminal to which the distribution content has been distributed;

judging, based on the received response whether or not the fulfillment condition has been satisfied; and

if the fulfillment condition has been satisfied, executing the response to the user terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed and/or the source user terminal.

17. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

receiving, from setter-user terminals among the user terminals, settings as to receiving conditions that serve as criteria for judging whether or not to receive the distribution content;

storing the receiving conditions correlatively with user identifiers identifying the setter-user terminals;

judging, prior to transmitting the distribution content, whether or not the receiving conditions are satisfied for a user terminal to selected to receive the distribution content; and

transmitting the distribution content if the receiving conditions are satisfied according to the judging.

18. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

receiving, from setter-user terminals among the user terminals, settings as to forwarding conditions that serve as criteria for judging whether or not to transmit to some or all of the destination user terminals the distribution content;

storing the forwarding conditions correlatively with user identifiers identifying the setter-user terminals;

judging whether or not the forwarding conditions are satisfied for a destination user terminal to which the distribution content has been distributed are satisfied; and

ending distribution for the destination terminal for which the forwarding conditions are not satisfied according to the judging.

19. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further comprising:

judging whether or not the destination user terminals include any user terminals to which the distribution content has already been transmitted, so that the distribution content is transmitted only to the destination user terminals to which the distribution content has not already been transmitted.

20. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further including:

storing incentive criteria for determining incentives offered to user terminals having received and/or transmitted the distribution content; and

offering, to the user terminals having received and/or transmitted the distribution content, incentives in accordance with the incentive criteria.

21. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The information-distribution method set forth by claim 1, further comprising:

grouping the at least one other user identifiers in the buddy list, if more than one, and storing them group-by-group correlatively with group names, wherein the distribution condition includes identicalness or similarity between associations of the group names; and

judging whether or not a group name stored correlatively with a source user identifier is identical with or similar to a group name designated by the distribution condition, and determining a user terminal stored correlatively with a group name judged to be an identical or similar user terminal to be a destination terminal to which the distribution content is distributed.

22. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution device connected to user terminals via a network, the information-distribution device comprising:

designation-accepting means for accepting from any of the user terminals designation of at least one other user terminal among the user terminals;

storing means for storing a buddy list in which at least one identifier identifying a user terminal is correlated with at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal whose designation has been accepted by said designation-accepting means;

information-accepting means for accepting, from a source user terminal among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed;

distribution-condition-accepting means for accepting from the source terminal a distribution condition according to which the distribution content is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;

distributee-candidate-determining means for determining one or more primary destination terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the primary destination terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition;

first distribution means for transmitting the distribution content to the one or more primary destination terminals; and

distribution-catenating means for iteratively activating second distribution means respectively located in each of the user terminals that have received the distribution content, each second distribution means for transmitting the distribution content, from any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent, to some or all of one or more destination user terminals selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the a buddy list of the recipient user terminal, in accordance with the distribution condition; ~~and distribution-catenating means for iteratively activating said second distribution means, until the stop condition is satisfied.~~

23. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a information-distribution program utilized by a computer connected to user terminals via a network, the computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a information-distribution program for executing:

accepting, from any of the user terminals, designation of at least one other user terminal among the user terminals;

storing a buddy list in which at least one identifier identifying a user terminal is correlated with at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal designated in said accepting designation;

accepting, from a source user terminal among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed and a distribution condition according to which the distribution content is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;

determining one or more primary destination user terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the primary destination user terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition;

transmitting the distribution content to the one or more primary destination user terminals;

until the stop condition is satisfied, ~~for~~by any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent, determining one or more destination user terminals to which the informational content will be distributed, the one or more destination user terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in ~~the~~a buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition, and transmitting the informational content to some or all of one or more ~~third~~destination user terminals that are registered in the buddy list of the ~~distributee candidate terminals; and a distribution-catenating step of repeating said second distribution step, wherein said distribution-condition-accepting step includes receiving a stop condition for stopping said distribution-catenating step~~ recipient user terminal.

24. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer product utilized by a computer connected to user terminals via a network, the information-distribution product for making the computer function as:

designation-accepting means for accepting from any of the user terminals designation of at least one other user terminal among the user terminals;

storing means for storing a buddy list in which at least one identifier identifying a user terminal is correlated with at least one other identifier identifying the at least one other user terminal whose designation has been accepted by said designation-accepting means;

information-accepting means for accepting, from a source user terminal among the user terminals, an informational content to be distributed;

distribution-condition-accepting means for accepting from the source terminal a distribution condition according to which the distribution content is distributed, the distribution condition including a stop condition;

distributee-candidate-determining means for determining one or more primary destination terminals to which the distribution content will be distributed, the primary destination terminals being selected from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the source terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition;

first distribution means for transmitting the distribution content to the one or more primary destination terminals;

second distribution means for transmitting the distribution content, ~~from~~ by any recipient user terminal to which the distribution content has been sent, to some or all of one or more destination user terminals selected by the recipient user terminal from user terminals whose identifiers are correlatively stored with the identifier of the recipient terminal in the buddy list, in accordance with the distribution condition; and

distribution-catenating means for iteratively activating said second distribution means, until the stop condition is satisfied.

25. (WITHDRAWN). An information-distribution method utilized by an information-exchange server able to communicate with a plurality of user terminals via a network, the information distribution method:

accepting, user-by-user in advance, registration of other users whom a given desires will consult information, and storing, as information exchange relationship data, identifier information for the given user, correlatively with the other users of whom it is desired to consult information;

accepting, user-by-user, redistration of first information pertaining to the given user, and, based on the information-exchange relationship data, reporting or disclosing the first information to users having an information-exchange relationship to the given user; and

accepting, user-by-user, registration of second information containing conditions, picking out, as starting point, users included in the distribution conditions who will be first distributes and, as distributes for the second information, users who, based on the information-exchange relationship data, fit the distribution conditions, and transmitting the second information to the users picked out.

26-28. (CANCELLED).

29. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method for a system including a computer and user terminals connected via a network, the information-distribution method including:

providing distribution content to be distributed and a stop distribution condition to the computer by a source user terminal among the user terminals;

determining one or more destination terminals to which the distribution content is distributed by the computer based on a buddy list corresponding to the source terminal, transmitted by the source terminal with the distribution content;

first transmitting the distribution content from the computer to the one or more destination terminals;

iteratively, until the stop condition is met,

determining one or more destination terminals to which the distribution content to be distributed by the computer, any recipient terminal who has received the distribution content based on buddy lists received from terminals to which the distribution content has been distributed, and

distributing the distribution content from the computer recipient terminal to the one or more destination terminals, ~~wherein the destination terminals determine when the condition is met.~~

30. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An information-distribution method for a system including a computer and user terminals connected via a network, the information-distribution method including:

distributing a distribution content provided by a first user terminal to the computer, to one or more second user terminals identified on a buddy list as corresponding to the first user terminal; and

distributing the distribution content from user terminals that received the distribution content to one or more user terminals identified in buddy lists of the respective user terminals until a stop distribution condition provided by the first terminal is met, wherein any user terminal that distribution content determines the one or more user terminals to which to distribute the content.